



NM is 20th in per-pupil spending, but near the bottom in results

By [Rob Nikolewski](#)

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NO. 20 AND RISING: An annual study done by the National Education Association shows New Mexico jumped from 25th to 20th in per-pupil spending in the past year.

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SANTA FE, N.M. — For years, New Mexico has finished near the bottom in national educational measurements such as reading and math, which has led to calls from some interest groups to increase student spending.

But according to an annual study by the [National Education Association](#) ^[2], the largest teachers' union in the country, New Mexico ranks 20th in per-pupil spending.

That's five notches higher than last year, when New Mexico ranked 25th in expenditures for public schools per student in kindergarten through 12th grade.

The NEA's "[Rankings of the States 2013 and Estimates of School Statistics 2014](#)" ^[3] came out this spring showing New Mexico spent \$11,019 per student for the 2012-2013 school year. That's 20th in the country and slightly above the U.S. average of \$10,938 and above the national median of \$10,251:

H-11. CURRENT EXPENDITURES FOR PUBLIC K-12 SCHOOLS PER STUDENT IN FALL ENROLLMENT, 2012-13 (\$)

1.	VERMONT	19,752 *
2.	NEW YORK	19,523 *
3.	NEW JERSEY	19,291 *
4.	ALASKA	18,192
5.	RHODE ISLAND	17,666 *
6.	CONNECTICUT	16,403 *
7.	WYOMING	15,943
8.	MASSACHUSETTS	15,881
9.	NEW HAMPSHIRE	15,394 *
10.	MARYLAND	15,229 *
11.	DELAWARE	14,890 *
12.	PENNSYLVANIA	14,467 *
13.	DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	14,406 *
14.	MICHIGAN	13,686 *
15.	ILLINOIS	12,927 *
16.	WEST VIRGINIA	12,112 *
17.	HAWAII	11,799
18.	MINNESOTA	11,632 *
19.	WISCONSIN	11,395 *
20.	NEW MEXICO	11,019
	UNITED STATES	10,938 *
21.	COLORADO	10,884 *
22.	VIRGINIA	10,695 *
23.	MAINE	10,476
24.	MONTANA	10,341 *
25.	LOUISIANA	10,310 *
26.	OREGON	10,251
27.	MISSOURI	10,093 *
28.	KENTUCKY	10,033
29.	OHIO	9,941 *
30.	WASHINGTON	9,908 *
31.	SOUTH CAROLINA	9,795
32.	KANSAS	9,689 *
33.	NEBRASKA	9,621 *
34.	IOWA	9,609
35.	GEORGIA	9,426 *
36.	ARKANSAS	9,384
37.	SOUTH DAKOTA	9,347 *
38.	CALIFORNIA	9,060 *
39.	ALABAMA	8,811
40.	TENNESSEE	8,647 *
41.	NORTH DAKOTA	8,549
42.	FLORIDA	8,539
43.	IDAHO	8,528 *
44.	NEVADA	8,501 *
45.	MISSISSIPPI	8,466 *
46.	NORTH CAROLINA	8,363
47.	TEXAS	8,275
48.	INDIANA	8,064
49.	OKLAHOMA	7,912
50.	UTAH	7,223 *
51.	ARIZONA	6,949 *
	METRIAN	10,251 [4]

The per-pupil figure is \$816 higher than last year's NEA study, [reported by New Mexico Watchdog](#) ^[5], that showed the state spending \$10,203 per student.

What's more, NEA researchers this year ranked New Mexico sixth in the nation for per capita state government expenditures for all education, which included higher education.

In the 19 measurements of school expenditures done by the NEA study, New Mexico finished in the top 10 in the nation in six categories and finished in the top half in 17.

New Mexico's lowest finish was 26th in the nation in two measurements of expenditures per K-12 students who are listed under the Americans with Disabilities Act. ([Click here to read the entire NEA study](#)^[3] and see pages 52-58 for the data on school spending by state.)

[State Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon, D-Milan](#)^[6], said he's in favor of increasing spending on public education, adding that the NEA study doesn't change his mind.

"We're spending a lot of money but you've got to remember, we have a lot more needs," Alcon told New Mexico Watchdog. "We have so many different cultures in our state, and that makes it difficult to teach."

But the NEA numbers did not surprise state [Sen. John Arthur Smith, D-Deming](#)^[7].

"John Q. Public really has no idea of how much financial effort that the taxpayers and the citizens have poured into this and are still waiting for different outcomes," Smith said. "The issue that puzzles me the most is that when suggestions come on how we should change things, there's an outcry and the final result is, let's keep doing the same thing."

Charles Goodmacher, government relations director for [NEA-New Mexico](#)^[8], didn't dispute the national NEA numbers, but said the state should spend more money on education.

"If other (states) are underfunding too, then that doesn't mean we're doing a good job of funding because we're funding at a higher level than they are," Goodmacher said.

Goodmacher said New Mexico's high poverty rates means many students have to deal with more out-of-school issues than children in other states.

"That requires more spending per pupil to make up for," he said. "There are so many extra services that are needed in New Mexico to have the students ready physically as well as emotionally."

New Mexico's fourth-grade reading scores in 2013 were [lower than those in 49 other states](#)^[9], according to the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#)^[10], and the state's fourth-grade math scores were [lower than 46 other states](#).^[11]

About the same time the NEA released its findings, a scholar from the [Cato Institute](#)^[12], a libertarian-leaning think tank based in Washington, D.C., made headlines by [claiming there is no correlation](#)^[13] between school spending and academic achievement.

In his study of academic performance during the past four decades, [Andrew Coulson](#)^[14] concluded that despite large increases in spending, "the takeaway from this study is that what we've done over the past 40 years hasn't worked. The average performance change nationwide has declined 3 percent in mathematical and verbal skills."

[New Mexico Voices for Children](#)^[15], which has long advocated for increased spending for public schools, disagreed.

“The Cato report assumes that education money is spent the same way it was in the 1960s and ’70s,” the organization said in an email. “In fact, schools have been mandated to provide many more services — special education, after-school programs, computer sciences, etc. — and today’s classrooms require much more technology than they did in the days of the mimeograph.”